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When it comes to the suburban transportation crisis, the effect of various discussions from the past week was to recall that old adage about the weather: Everybody talks about it, but nobody ever does anything about it.

Transportation projects drew attention in at least three different government venues -- the governor's budget, a meeting of the Regional Transportation Authority and a news conference by suburban congressmen.

Addressing the region's critical transportation needs is a multi-faceted challenge, of course. It requires efforts at the local, state and federal levels. And, to be sure, officials at all those levels are studying potential solutions. But the question remains whether anyone is paying attention -- or at least enough attention to help make any of the ideas come to pass.

At the state level, Gov. Rod Blagojevich's proposal this week called for \$25 billion in capital projects, but it includes only \$1 billion in new funding for public transportation, supplemented by a \$1.7 billion federal match.

That's a start. But it actually leaves more than \$4 billion on the table.

As U.S. Reps. Mark Kirk, a Highland Park Republican, and Melissa Bean, a Barrington Democrat, pointed out in a joint news conference, that scenario doesn't provide the funding that could unlock billions in federal matching funds. Kirk and Bean outlined nearly \$7 billion in projects that will become endangered if the state doesn't provide about \$2.8 billion.

Among other things, the shortfall threatens the progress of the much-heralded and much-needed STAR commuter rail line that would provide a transportation link among numerous towns in the West and Northwest suburbs.

That proposal already is threatened by the Canadian National Railway's plans to buy the Elgin, Joliet and Eastern Railroad, running in an arc from Waukegan to Gary, Ind.

Meanwhile, the Regional Transportation Authority examined a proposal for spending up to \$8 billion for an intriguing list of suburban needs, including an extension of the CTA's Blue Line,

car-pool lanes on the Reagan Tollway and I-290, and a bus rapid transit line from Schaumburg through DuPage County on I-355.

The RTA's wish list was a pleasure to see and consider. But one couldn't help wonder whether the proposals were little more than idle dreams if the state cannot scrounge up the money for billions of dollars of projects already identified and slated for completion.

One of the toughest impediments to getting anything done on transportation in the past year was the dysfunctional relationship between the governor and lawmakers. House Speaker Michael Madigan was right this week when he said people expect their leaders to solve that problem immediately.

That, at least, will make some movement possible on transportation matters, but it's also clear that transportation planners' eyes are a lot bigger than government's pockets right now, and the pocket-size side of that equation needs real and immediate attention.